

Waterfowl Advisory Committee
Minutes, August 14, 2007
Rembert Dennis Building
Columbia, South Carolina

MEMBERS PRESENT: Chair Sam Hiott, William "Tadpole" Baldwin, Jr., Campbell Coxe, Lin Fore, Robin Inabinet, Phil Wilkinson, Parker Barnes, Jr., Stephen Thomas

MEMBERS ABSENT: Carlyle Blakeney, Jr., Billy Ray Cato, Craig LeSchack, Craig Sasser

DNR STAFF PRESENT: Breck Carmichael, Val Nash, Derrell Shipes, Tim Ivey, Sam Chappellear, Walt Rhodes, Dean Harrigal, Susan Johnson, Law Enforcement Officers Dudley Britt and Ken Simmons and Bob Perry from DNR's Environmental Section.

DNR Board Chairman Michael McShane participated in the meeting via conference call.

Chair Hiott opened the meeting and the minutes of the May 9, 2007 meeting were approved as submitted.

DNR BOARD APPROVED 2007-08 STATE WATERFOWL STAMP BUDGET: Derrell Shipes, Chief, Statewide Projects, Research and Surveys, provided a handout reflecting the breakdown of funds (copy attached to the original minutes). Shipes stated the DNR Board approved the budget on July 20, 2007. The total budget amount is \$171,000 to be distributed as follows:

1. Wood Duck Box Project: \$55,000
2. Control of Undesirable Vegetation \$39,000 - Chairman McShane stated aquatic vegetation is still a priority and additional dollars will be utilized by the LWC Division of DNR, working with the WFF Division and private landowners as well
3. Waterfowl (Wood Duck) Plot Survey Feasibility Study: \$30,000/yr. (2 years)
4. Santee Coastal Reserve Operations and Maintenance: \$21,000
5. Santee NWR, Southern James Bay Canada Goose Study: \$15,000/yr. (2 years)
6. Piedmont Habitat Management: \$6,000
7. Habitat Management on Donnelley/Bear Island WMAs: \$5,000

UPDATE ON WATERFOWL HUNTING GUIDE: Wildlife Biologist Dean Harrigal provided a draft of the Waterfowl Hunting and Baiting Guide (copy attached to the original minutes). Harrigal stated staff is moving to press with the guide, which will coincide with the printing of DNR's Migratory Bird Regulations brochure in early September. The guide is a compilation of the US Fish and Wildlife Service's (USFWS) guide and frequently asked questions/answers. The guide also addresses potential problem areas in terms of what is/is not legal. Harrigal informed the Committee that the guide has been thoroughly reviewed by the DNR (WFF and LE Divisions), and USFWS Region IV officers and other officials in the USFWS Atlanta office. Plans are to distribute the guide to waterfowl hunters and it will also be available on DNR's website.

TRENDS IN CONTINENTAL WATERFOWL POPULATIONS, 1955-2007: Dean Harrigal presented the USFWS's 2007 Report of North America's Waterfowl Populations and Habitat Conditions video. The video report is an overview of the condition of waterfowl populations and breeding habitat in North America. Each spring, more than 2.2 million square miles of habitat, including parts of Alaska, Canada and the northcentral and eastern United States are surveyed by biologists from the US and Canada. The survey is widely recognized as one of the most comprehensive and reliable wildlife surveys in the world. The report reflects total breeding ducks in the traditional survey area at 41.2 million, up 14% above last year's figures. With the exception of northern pintail and scaup all species breeding populations were near or above long-term averages. Pintails and scaup estimates were unchanged from 2006, remaining 19% and 33% respectively below their long-term averages.

For information purposes, Harrigal also distributed a report entitled "Estimated Waterfowl Harvest and Hunter Activity from 1999-2005 in South Carolina" (based upon Harvest Information Program data of the USFWS, copy attached to the original minutes). The handout reflects the estimate of the total harvest, along with various species breakdowns. Harrigal stated wood ducks are still the most important bird in the bag for South Carolina with an estimate of 11 birds per hunter in 2006, one of the highest estimates in the Atlantic Flyway.

LEGISLATIVE UPDATE: Deputy Director Carmichael highlighted several bills relative to the WFF Division from the 2007 session of the General Assembly. Assistant Deputy Director Val Nash distributed copies of the Status of Legislation (copy attached to the original minutes).

Carmichael stated in the budget process approximately \$20 million in new funds (mostly non-recurring) were approved in the DNR budget. The WFF Division received funds for needed repairs to the Santee Coastal lodge and the house at Samworth WMA. Some repairs are currently underway. Approximately \$2 million was received for updating freshwater fish hatcheries. Carmichael also stated the Agency received funds for another class of 25 LE officers.

S.283, a bill giving DNR regulatory authority on leased WMA lands was passed.

There were a number of bills that will automatically become active again in the 2008 legislative session due to 2008 being the second year of a legislative session.

S.452, a bill that would allow DNR to establish a recreational alligator-hunting season through a public drawing passed the Senate and was stalled in the House. DNR will pursue this legislation again in the 2008 session.

H.3020 resides in the Agriculture, Natural Resources and Environmental Affairs Committee. This bill would have required the DNR to allow horseback riding on all DNR managed lands.

H.3510 amended the statute relating to the purchase of a migratory waterfowl stamp. This bill was technical in nature to allow the electronic sale of the migratory waterfowl stamp. This bill was amended in the House Committee to increase the cost of the duck stamp from \$5.50 to \$10.00. Although DNR did not request the increase, the Agency supported this increase. Carmichael stated results from the waterfowl hunter survey conducted two years ago indicated support for an increase in the waterfowl stamp, as long as funds would be used for waterfowl management. Governor Sanford vetoed the bill, and the General Assembly sustained the veto. Staff plans to re-file this bill, without the fee increase, in order to get the technical changes needed.

H.4023 resides in the Committee on Agriculture, Natural Resources and Environmental Affairs. In part, this legislation revises the number and size of striped bass taken or possessed in Lakes Marion and Moultrie. This bill would also require DNR to put at least 75% of hatchery raised strip bass into the Santee Cooper system.

Chairman McShane stated the USFWS recently issued a press release allowing the states of Arkansas, Colorado, Florida, Idaho, Maryland, Minnesota, New York, Texas and Wisconsin to sell the Federal duck stamp electronically. At the time an individual purchases the Federal duck stamp they will be given a code, which will be accepted as evidence of the purchase of the stamp for a forty-five day period. At the end of the forty-five days, the code will expire and individuals should have received the physical stamp. This system will become effective September 1, 2007. McShane further stated South Carolina elected not to participate in the program this year due to the upgrading of DNR's computer system. Once the new point of sale system has been upgraded, South Carolina will most likely participate.

2007-08 DNR STAFF WATERFOWL SEASON RECOMMENDATION: Derrell Shipes provided the 2007-08 Late Season Framework (as provided by the US Fish and Wildlife Service) and a copy of staff waterfowl season recommendations (copies attached to the original minutes).

There were few changes from the framework for waterfowl season offered by the USFWS last year, with the exception of an increase in the daily limit on canvasbacks from 1 to 2 (2 to 4 in possession). Staff recommendations for the 2007-08 duck season include a 50-day season (November 21 through November 25 and December 14 through January 27) with a six-bird bag (it was not known that an additional canvasback in the bag would be offered at the time staff formulated their recommendations). Staff plans to request that the DNR Board set the youth dates on Saturday December 8 and Sunday December 9, for individuals fifteen years of age or younger accompanied by an adult 18 years or older (the adult will not be allowed to carry a gun or hunt). Daily bag limits: 6 total, including no more than 4 mallards (1 hen), 2 scaup, 1 pintail, 1 canvasback, 1 fulvous whistling duck, 1 black-bellied whistling duck, 2 wood ducks, 2 redheads and 1 black duck or 1 mottled duck.

Staff also recommends the brant season at 50 days (concurrent with the duck season dates).

A discussion followed.

David Wielicki, Executive Director of the SC Waterfowl Association, stated he feels a combined effort on the part of DNR, the SC Waterfowl Association and Ducks Unlimited in developing a statewide youth duck hunting education program could result in more youth becoming duck hunters.

Committee Member Fore inquired about gathering information at public landings whereby hunters would be asked to complete a survey regarding the placement of the youth days. Chairman McShane stated there are resources throughout the Department that could be utilized to gather the information, and even volunteers could assist.

2007-08 WAC WATERFOWL SEASON RECOMMENDATION: Chair Hiott received a motion that the Committee take advantage of the Federal and State youth hunts at the beginning and end of the season (December 8 and 9 and February 2 and 3 as youth days). The motion carried unanimously. The WAC supported all other aspects of the staff recommendation, and added the additional canvasback in the daily bag. This motion will be part of the Committee's recommendation to the DNR Board.

Shipes stated this proposal would allow for 54 gunning days: 50 days of regular season, 2 days under the State youth hunting law and 2 days under Federal youth hunting regulation.

PEER REVIEW UPDATE: Chair Hiott thanked Committee Member Wilkinson for his efforts in the peer review process. Chair Hiott stated two areas have been selected for the next peer reviews: a revisiting of the South Island peer review, and Bonneau Ferry. Copies of the Suggested Waterfowl Area Peer Review Protocol were distributed (copy attached to the original minutes). Chair Hiott stated he would like to be included as a team member in the peer review process and invited WAC members to join in the process as well. Plans are for the peer review team to spend several days touring each location selected and meeting to discuss findings afterwards. Suggestions for the composition of the peer review team are: 1 DNR staff, 1 Ducks Unlimited representative, 1 USFWS representative, 1 private sector representation, a minimum of 1 WAC member and the waterfowl area manager for properties selected for review.

Chair Hiott announced he has asked Lou Crouch (manager of Cheehaw Cumbee Plantation) to join as the private sector representative. Additionally, WAC member Craig Sasser with the USFWS has agreed to serve on the team. Colin Smith will serve as the representative from Ducks Unlimited. Mike Provost with The Nature Conservancy will also serve on the team. Jamie Dozier, manager for South Island will serve, and Sam Chappellear, Region IV Wildlife Coordinator will serve or select an alternative for the Bonneau Ferry peer review. Chappellear would also like the technician on site at Bonneau Ferry, Tom Harkins, to participate as well.

Plans are to implement this process in the fall and at the Committee's November meeting a report on the findings will be discussed.

Committee Member Thomas stated he would like to participate in the peer review of Bonneau Ferry.

CONSTITUENT-WAC INTERNET COMMUNICATION FORUM UPDATE:

Deputy Director Carmichael stated the Committee had expressed an interest in designing a venue for receiving input from the public. Carmichael stated because of space constrictions on DNR's website, a separate web page for the WAC is not possible, however the WAC minutes are already being posted on DNR's website. Carmichael distributed copies of a list of DNR's Outdoor Forums that are available on the website. Carmichael stated a WAC forum could be established as well. Clarification of the forum would explain to the public that the purpose of the forum is to receive public comments concerning waterfowl hunting, management, regulations, etc. in South Carolina, but that while WAC members and DNR staff would have access to review information received in the forum, responses would not be generated.

Chair Hiott stated he would like to see this forum implemented with the understanding the writer would be informed a response would not be forthcoming and that comments received in the forum would be reviewed by WAC members. Committee Member Thomas stated he did not see that another the forum was needed, since SC Ducks.com already existed and was quite active. Chair Hiott stated this forum would receive issues directly related to the WAC. A suggestion was made that other waterfowl specific websites could contain a link to DNR's WAC forum.

OLD BUSINESS: Committee Member Fore asked about body searches on wildlife management areas. Deputy Director Carmichael stated there is a WMA regulation stating when an individual enters WMA properties, they are consenting to a search. Carmichael stated he discussed this issue with Col. Alvin Taylor and in the future when an individual enters a WMA site, a sign will be posted warning of the possibility of a physical search. Officers will be instructed to be mindful of the sensitivity of such searches. Carmichael further stated a statement will be included on hunt site applications and notifications that individuals selected will be subject to a search.

Fore also asked if any progress had been made on increasing more hunting opportunities on Santee Coastal Reserve. Carmichael stated previous problems for limited hunting on SCR had not been resolved i.e., no additional licensed captains and limited staff. Carmichael further stated there are actually less captains than previous years and a new waterfowl manager, Jamie Rader, will begin September 2nd, replacing Jim Westerhold, the previous manager of SCR. Carmichael stated he is not comfortable adding more hunting opportunities on SCR until more stability with staff can be obtained.

Committee Member Inabinet inquired about stocking of grass carp in the Santee Cooper system. Bob Perry (from DNR's Environmental Section) stated grass carp were stocked

several months ago. Inabinet stated he had knowledge that some stocking had recently occurred and Perry stated he would make an inquiry into the recent stocking and notify Inabinet of his findings.

Committee Member Thomas inquired about surveying individuals who hunt Carr and Little Carr Creeks this year (when they are not hunting) in order to obtain feedback regarding recent hunting restrictions. Thomas also stated he had hunted The Hatchery WMA and how the area was overrun with fisherman during the hunting season. He asked if Law Enforcement could give this area more attention.

Thomas also inquired about sign postings in the Sandy Beach area, indicating a need for boundary markers in the area.

NEW BUSINESS:

Committee Member Inabinet inquired about duck seasons in other states. Dean Harrigal stated discussions are ongoing in the Atlantic Flyway regarding shrinking the packages whereby a normal duck season is a 50-day season. Harrigal further stated South Carolina has taken the lead on their own and at present it would be impossible to state a time line as to when other states will decide on a 50-day season.

Committee Member Fore stated some private landowners in the Carr and Little Carr Creeks area have been closing off creeks with pilings, gates and several ditches have been blocked off. These activities are generating controversy in the area. Fore stated perhaps this issue should be investigated.

CONSTITUENT COMMENTS: David Wielicki thanked WAC members for their efforts in serving on the Committee. Wielicki stated overall in the State the status of waterfowl habitat on State managed, USFWS refuges, and on private impoundments has been greatly improved, resulting in a positive benefit in the numbers of waterfowl wintering in the State.

Wielicki asked WAC members to consider reviewing habitat on properties owned by the USFWS. Wielicki stated the SC Waterfowl Association magazine would be happy to publish articles relative to the findings of the Peer Review Team and the efforts of DNR staff.

TIME AND PLACE OF NEXT MEETING: Tuesday, November 13, 2007, time and location to be announced.